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Bombs and Border Crossings: Peace Activist Networks and the Post-colonial State in Africa, 1959-62

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On 9th December 1959, a small convoy of vehicles left the settlement of Navrongo, on the border of Ghana and Upper Volta, and headed north. The convoy's passengers comprised an international team of peace campaigners, including the British anti-colonial cleric, Michael Scott, a French member of War Resisters International, Pierre Martin, and US peace campaigner and civil rights activist, Bayard Rustin. The veteran US pacifist A.J. Muste had accompanied the team to the border before returning to the town of Bawku to report on their progress. The aim of the convoy was to travel the thousand miles or so across the Francophone territories of the Sahel and southern Sahara until they reached the military base at Reggane in Algeria, the site of impending French nuclear weapons tests. Passing the borderline unnoticed, 'out in a near-desert no-man's land', it was not until the convoy had travelled sixteen miles into Upper Volta and reached the town of Bittou that police signalled the convoy to halt. As discussions took place, locals gathered around, clearly aware of what had brought the strange group into their midst, and equally clear in their ambivalence towards the French bomb test. 'If it's harmless', one observer suggested, 'why not hold it in the country outside Paris, so that all the French people can see the wonder!'¹ The situation quickly developed into a stalemate. Armed police surrounded the convoy, and the stand-off lasted several days before the team retreated to Ghana. A smaller second group returned at the end of December and held a vigil at the border-post for two weeks, before they in turn were sent back to Ghana. In a final attempt, this time on foot, the team managed to hitch-hike as far as Tenkodogo, sixty miles inside Upper Volta, before they found themselves again in the hands of French police.

The efforts of the Sahara protest appeared to have helped focus international public attention on the French tests. As the team made repeated attempts to cross the border, public demonstrations of support were organised in Africa, Europe and the United States. Pierre Martin returned to Accra and held a fast outside the French Embassy, while Nigerian team-member Hilary Arinze followed suit outside the French Consulate in Lagos. Pickets were held at French government buildings in London, New York and Hamburg and as the date of the test approached, large rallies were held in Tunisia, Libya and Morocco, and 500 African students were arrested in Paris at a demonstration on

¹ Muste, A. J. 'Memo for Liberation', December 12, 1959. Swarthmore College Peace Collection (SPC) Muste Papers, 89/16/Sahara Protest Team.

11th February.² Following the detonation of the bomb, *Gerboise Bleue*, on 13th February, the protest team returned to Accra and sought to persuade officials in Ghana to maintain international pressure against the French test programme. Following discussions with the team, the Ghanaian Prime Minister, Kwame Nkrumah called an emergency meeting of African states to discuss the nuclear tests alongside ‘the new form of colonialism and its attempt to Balkanize the continent and destroy African unity’.³ At the conference, held in Accra in April 1960, opposition to French nuclear weapons tests, which had originated as an attempt to mobilise European anti-nuclear campaigns, had metamorphosed into a pan-African protest against ‘nuclear imperialism’ and neo-colonialism.

The unsuccessful border crossings of the Sahara protest team provide an informative starting point for a wider discussion of transnational peace activism in the early 1960s. As a collaboration between the Ghanaian government, the British Direct Action Committee (DAC) and the US Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA), this was without doubt an event that was shaped by connections across national boundaries. However, before defining the framework in which these connections are to be explored, a brief note on the nature and viability of transnational history is required. Discussions of the merits (or otherwise) of a transnational approach invariably depart from a consideration of the relationship and distinctions between ‘transnational’, ‘global’ and ‘world’ history.⁴ My contention is that a transnational approach is best understood as a methodological requirement when seeking a global perspective on post-1945 history. The transnational connections between European, US and African disarmament movements must be placed centre stage in a global history of anti-nuclear weapons movements of the early 1960s. As Isabel Hofmeyr has suggested, not only are ‘historical processes ... made in different places but that they are constructed in the movement between places, sites, and regions’.⁵ While histories of the emergence of popular movements opposed to nuclear weapons have taken account of their international dimensions, there continues to be a tendency to define the scope of enquiry by particular national or regional criteria.⁶ The transnational dimensions of what was understood as a threat of global proportions, remain under-explored.

² April Carter, ‘The Sahara Protest Team’, in A Paul Hare and Herbert H. Blumberg, eds., *Liberation without violence: a third-party approach* (Collings: London, 1977) pp. 137; 140.

³ ‘Cable Received from Accra’, March 6, 1960. Archives of the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War, University of Bradford (DAC) 5/7/20.

⁴ See, for example, C. A Bayly, S. Beckert, M. Connelly, I. Hofmeyr, W. Kozol, and P. Seed, ‘AHR Conversation: On Transnational History’, *The American Historical Review*, 111 (December 2006), pp. 1441-1464; P. Clavin, ‘Defining Transnationalism’, *Contemporary European History*, 14 (November 2005), pp. 421-439.

⁵ Ibid, p. 1444.

⁶ For example, Lawrence Wittner’s account of the ‘world movement’ nevertheless tends to divide international movements by nation, or region. The Sahara protest is therefore an example of ‘Third World’ activism in Africa, not of US or European activism: Lawrence Wittner, *Resisting the bomb: a history of the world nuclear disarmament movement 1954-1970*. (Stanford, 1997), pp. 266-267.

Meanwhile, networks that had emerged in support of anti-colonial movements were by nature transnational, bridging the space between international sympathizers and African political activists. The Sahara protest thus reveals, according to one observer, how ‘national liberation and nation-building, pan-Africanism and the radical, transnational peace movement were constitutive political struggles’.⁷ Thanks to its status as one of the first African states to achieve independence, together with a political leadership strongly committed to pan-African and internationalist policies, Ghana was of critical international importance in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and has provided a focus for recent accounts setting the histories of US Civil Rights movements and African independence within a global social dynamics.⁸ And yet, the interactions between transnational peace campaigns and the Ghanaian state was also shaped by what Kelly and Kaplan have described as the ‘routinization of the nation-state’; relations between peace activists and government officials were both enabled and constrained by decolonization.⁹ The history of peace activists’ interactions with Africa at the point of decolonization must therefore set any concerns with its transnational dimensions alongside those determined by the normative political entity, the nation-state.

Furthermore, the Sahara protest and the multi-lateral conferences on ‘nuclear imperialism’ that followed it also illustrate the ways in which pan-African politics interacted with pan-European social movements. While the momentum of protest against French nuclear weapons tests in the Sahara was sustained by African political activity, much of the initial organizational impetus for the protests came from within European pacifist and anti-nuclear movements. As such, the process of negotiating and engaging with the politics of African liberation reveals easily overlooked aspects of transnational European anti-nuclear weapons movements. Studies of European nuclear disarmament movements have shown that individual movements tended to frame their campaigns within particular national political discourses, rather than seeking to develop broader transnational frames of reference. Their histories, as Nehring has argued, reveal the interconnections between the national and international, and must be grounded methodologically in an examination of the

⁷ J. Allman, ‘Nuclear Imperialism and the Pan-African Struggle for Peace and Freedom: Ghana, 1959–1962 1’, *Souls*, 10 (2008), pp. 84; 98. Other accounts of the Sahara protest are provided in; Carter, op. cit. ; Bill Sutherland and Matt Meyer, *Guns and Gandhi in Africa: Pan African insights on nonviolence, armed struggle and liberation in Africa* (Trenton, 2000).

⁸ See Kevin Kelly Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black expatriates and the civil rights era* (Chapel Hill, 2006); James Hunter Meriwether, *Proudly we can be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961* (Chapel Hill, 2002); Plummer, Brenda Gayle, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956–1974*, (Cambridge), 2012. For studies of British anti-colonialism see D. Goldsworthy, *Colonial Issues in British Politics 1945- 1961* (London, 1971); Stephen Howe, *Anticolonialism in British politics: the left and the end of Empire, 1918-1964* (Oxford, 1993); Rob Skinner, *The Foundations of Anti-Apartheid: liberal humanitarianism and transnational activism in Britain and the United States, c. 1919-64* (Basingstoke, 2010).

⁹ John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan, *Represented Communities: Fiji and World Decolonization*, (Chicago, 2001), p. 9. See also John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan, ‘Nation and Decolonization: Toward a New Anthropology of Nationalism’, *Anthropological Theory* 1, 4 (2001), pp. 419–437.

‘politics of communication’ across geographical borders.¹⁰ Disconnected from formal political organisations, transnational social movements seek to exert public influence by constructing a sense of identity and solidarity across borders, calling on ‘the unity of human solidarity’ in order to define a common ground between national movements.¹¹ In order to take account of the more complex interactions between European, African and US movements evident in the protests against the French Sahara tests, an adjustment of focus beyond the comparative study of national movements is necessary.

A study of interactions between Western and African movements needs to be carefully calibrated, in order to avoid superficial differentiations between identity-based social movements associated with cultural and social transformations in Western nation states, and ‘historical’ national liberation movements in the Third World. In his study of transnational anti-apartheid activism, Håkan Thörn has suggested that the eurocentrism implicit in new social movement theories can be circumvented by setting movements within a ‘global context of de-colonization’.¹² However, a transnational history of decolonization must also tackle interactions between organisations, individuals and networks that operated *across* national borders and those that were – or sought to be – engaged with more formal political processes *within* emerging post-colonial nation states. The interconnectedness of national and international movements suggests that a transnational approach cannot always be concerned, as some have suggested, with a view of the nation as ‘a thing contested, interrupted, and always shot through with contradiction’.¹³ I would argue that it is necessary instead to configure transnational histories of anti-nuclear activism in such a way as to foreground the complex and contradictory, but nevertheless significant connections across borders that were re-shaped by the process of decolonization. In order to historicize transnational anti-colonial or anti-nuclear peace movements in the ‘context of decolonization’, one must begin with the recognition that their activities were the bound up with the politics of the post-colonial State.

Lastly, it is also valuable to consider the most useful form in which transnational interactions should be conceived. Studies from the perspective of political science and international relations have tended in the past to focus on networks as a form of structure that sustains and channels

¹⁰ Nehring, H. Nehring, ‘National Internationalists: British and West German Protests against Nuclear Weapons, the Politics of Transnational Communications and the Social History of the Cold War, 1957-1964,’ *Contemporary European History*, 14 (November 2005), pp. 559-582. See also H. Nehring, ‘The British and West German protests against nuclear weapons and anti-colonialism, 1956-64’, *Socialist History Journal*, 31 (2007), pp. 9-39.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Without this perspective, new social movement theories run the risk of reproducing a teleological model of ‘modernization’. See Håkan Thörn, *Anti-apartheid and the emergence of a global civil society* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 8-10.

¹³ Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick, and J. T. Way, ‘Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis’, *American Quarterly*, 60 (September 2008), p 627.

transnational activism.¹⁴ This article suggests that a looser and more fluid conception of networks is required when assessing engagement between social movements and post-colonial African states. In this regard, it follows the definition of network, suggested by Frederick Cooper, which centres on ‘forms of affiliation and association that are less defined than a “structure” but more than just a collection of individuals engaging in transactions’.¹⁵ Networks provide a more durable focus for a study of transnational peace activism than the more diffuse concept of social movements. As Sidney Tarrow has suggested, transnational social movements, as a form of contentious politics, are ‘hard to construct, are difficult to maintain, and have very different relations to states and international institutions than the less contentious family of international NGOs or activist networks’.¹⁶ Social movements cohere around collective identities that crystallise around shared values and the construction of communities based on mutual trust; where movements interact across national boundaries this process can both inject new forms of meaning into the movement but also result in a fragile, imagined solidarity that is unable to provide a stable platform for lasting transnational movements. In the context of decolonization, however, transnational activism was manifest in the form of interconnected networks, not the formation of imagined communities of activists. What follows is an exploration of the development of these networks in the years following the Sahara protest, adding detail to historical understanding of the relationship between transnational activism, social movements, and the post-colonial nation-state.

Plans for a protest against the French atomic weapons programme were first raised by DAC delegates at the European Congress for Nuclear Disarmament, held in London in January 1959. They believed that an international protest would have ‘greater imaginative appeal’ than one launched in France alone, and would ‘symbolise our common concern about the threat of nuclear weapons’.¹⁷ After a sceptical response from the French delegation, the DAC were persuaded to shelve the campaign. Then, in June 1959, when the French authorities announced that a test site was

¹⁴ The obligatory reference in this context is to Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond borders: advocacy networks in international politics* (Ithaca, 1998). See also S. P. Huntington, ‘Transnational Organizations in World Politics’, *World Politics*, 25 (April 1973), pp. 333-368; K. Sikkink, ‘Human Rights, Principled Issue-Networks, and Sovereignty in Latin America’, *International Organization*, 47 (July 1993), pp. 411-441; K. Sikkink, ‘Transnational Politics, International Relations Theory, and Human Rights’, *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 31 (September 1998), pp. 517-523; A. Klotz, ‘Transnational Activism and Global Transformations: The Anti-Apartheid and Abolitionist Experiences’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 8 (March 2002), pp. 49-76.

¹⁵ Frederick Cooper, ‘Networks, Moral Discourse and History’, in Callaghy, Kassimir and Latham, *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa: Global-local Networks of Power*, (Cambridge, 2001), p. 24.

¹⁶ S. Tarrow, ‘Transnational Politics: Contention and Institutions in International Politics’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 4 (June 2001), pp. 1-20.

¹⁷ P. Arrowsmith to L. Frobenius, January 12, 1959. DAC 5/7/1; ‘Untitled Memo for European Congress’, n.d. [January 1959]. DAC 5/7/1..

being constructed at Reggane in southern Algeria the DAC revived the idea.¹⁸ At the end of August, working in collaboration with the London-based anti-colonial Committee of African Organisations (CAO), the group organised a demonstration in London to protest against what they described as French ‘nuclear imperialism’. Despite a heat wave that ‘had driven all but a few disconsolate tourists from the hot pavements’, around 2000 protesters attended a rally in Trafalgar Square, while a smaller number picketed the French Embassy.¹⁹ However, the collaboration between the DAC and the CAO dissipated soon after the rally, and the peace activists turned instead to the support of organisations in Europe and the United States.

In the formation of a viable transnational campaign against the French tests, the African-American activist Bill Sutherland became a vital conduit between European movements, US pacifist networks and the Ghanaian government. Having worked in Ghana since the mid-1950s, he had been instrumental in the formation of the Ghana Council for Nuclear Disarmament in August 1959, and was influential in the decision of the CNVA to back the Sahara protest team and send Rustin to Ghana in October 1959.²⁰ As a key aide of the Finance Minister and one of Nkrumah’s closest allies, Komla Gbedemah, Sutherland was well-placed to facilitate contacts between British, African and US campaigners. Despite their initial reluctance, the support of CNVA is less surprising given the similarities in approach and political philosophy between it and the DAC. Cited as an influence on the DAC and described as its ‘sister organisation’ by April Carter, the emergence and development of the CNVA depended on a web of transnational connections shared with its British counterpart, including Quaker networks, the Christian pacifist organisation the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, and War Resisters International.²¹ It was trans-Atlantic and pan-African networks with well-established connections, in contrast to more diffuse European anti-nuclear organisations, that shaped the international response to the French tests.

In particular, there appear to have been few comparable links between French anti-nuclear campaigners and the DAC. In September, less than a month before team members began to arrive in Accra, April Carter herself admitted that she had no knowledge of how ‘the French anti-atomic armament organisation argues its case’.²² In fact, the French delegates who had attended the London Congress, and taken a leading role in the formation of the French Federation Against Atomic Armament in April 1959 *had* begun to articulate opposition to the tests, and in similar terms

¹⁸ A. Carter to V. Hamers-Camatta, June 17, 1959 DAC 5/7/1.

¹⁹ ‘London Letter’, *The Guardian*, 31 August 1959; *Times*, 31 August 1959; ‘Africa Says No to French Tests’, August 1959, DAC/5/7/7.

²⁰ Lawrence Wittner, op. cit., p. 266; ‘Minutes of CNVA Committee Meeting’, October 6, 1959. SPC Muste Papers, Reel 89/16/Sahara Protest Team.

²¹ Lawrence Wittner op. cit.

²² A. Carter to A. Hamers and V. Hamers-Camatta, September 2, 1959. DAC 5/7/1.

to those used by British campaigners. Chief among those were the editor of *France-Observateur* Claude Bourdet and the pacifist Pastor Andre Trocmé, co-President of the Federation alongside the physicist Alfred Kastler. From the summer of 1959, the group began to co-ordinate a national campaign against the tests, including a petition signed in the main by academics and church officials.²³ However, with its audience being an intellectual elite, the French Federation was unable to generate a coherent mass response to the initial French tests.

One explanation for the failure to build a popular campaign in France cites nationalist sentiment; the desire to maintain – or regain – national prestige through a nuclear weapons programme.²⁴ This, together with the belief that support for a British-led campaign was complicity in ‘foreign interference’, underpinned the lack of French public enthusiasm for the Sahara project. Trocmé argued firmly that protests against the French tests needed to be ‘genuinely French, organised by the French, with the approval of French popular good sense’.²⁵ Nor were French attitudes to the Sahara protest plan softened by the picket of the French embassy in London that coincided with the Trafalgar Square rally – a point that was made by French activists to Michael Randle at a meeting in Paris shortly before his departure to Ghana. Despite the lack of ‘official’ backing from French anti-nuclear movements, the protest team were joined by two French members: Esther Peter, a translator for the Council of Europe, and Pierre Martin, a member of War Resisters International and the humanitarian organisation Service Civil International, who had been working for UNESCO in Ghana. Eventually – after protracted discussions and, in Kastler’s case, with great reluctance – the Federation leadership agreed to write to the French Foreign Minister, requesting that visas be granted to the protest team.²⁶ But essentially, French participation in the protest was confined to the individual contributions of Esther Peter and Pierre Martin. The transnational connections that brought the Sahara protest team together were therefore rooted in post-war international pacifist and humanitarian networks, rather than a cross-border alliance of anti-nuclear movements.

Protests against the French tests had brought British and US anti-nuclear pacifists into alliance with African anti-colonial campaigners who explicitly connected the history of ‘centuries of slavery and imperial exploitation’ with ‘the pollution of our air with radioactive fallout’.²⁷ In contrast, French activists had sought to downplay the colonial dimension of the protest. The tests took place at a delicate moment in the ‘endgame’ of the Algerian war, only months after de Gaulle

²³ Lawrence Wittner, op. cit., pp. 230-231.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Trocmé, quoted in A. Carter, op. cit., p. 152.

²⁶ E. Peter to A. J. Muste, January 1, 1960. SPC, Muste Papers, Reel 89/16/Sahara Protest Team.

²⁷ ‘London Letter’, *The Guardian*, 31 August 1959; *Times*, 31 August 1959; ‘Africa Says No to French Tests’, August 1959, DAC 5/7/7.

had accepted that self-determination would play a role in defining the future status of Algeria, and it is striking that the detonation of an atomic bomb in the territory does not appear to have figured in public debate.²⁸ French public opinion appeared wary of ‘extremist’ opposition to the war, which goes some way to explain why the Sahara protest was rebuffed by the French delegates at the London Congress, fearful that it would be dismissed as ‘Communist or anti-colonialist inspired’.²⁹ French opposition to the tests was articulated by a small body of pacifist campaigners morally and politically opposed to anything that hinted of a connection with the FLN and its violent struggle against French colonialism. The non-Communist left in France were, arguably, far from ‘anti-colonial’ in their perceptions of the struggle in Algeria, although at least one prominent figure was prepared to speak positively about the Sahara protest in private.³⁰ British campaigners nevertheless understood that the protest had to be insulated from any commentary on the war in Algeria to avoid alienating French opinion. In the context of a protest against French militarism, a ‘complete pacifist demand’ - that is, a campaign that embraced a call for an end to all violence in Algeria – was rejected as unworkable.³¹

Colonial issues were embedded in rather different ways within British anti-nuclear weapons protests, which were, in the eyes of some commentators, suffused with ‘imperialist pacifism’ and nationalist ‘romantic protest’.³² Campaigners for nuclear disarmament presented their movement as a pathway towards national redemption and the restoration of international power and prestige, with a non-nuclear Britain destined to become a neutral mediator between the Cold War superpowers and emergent ‘non-aligned’ nations.³³ In the wake of the Sahara protest, Michael Randle claimed that ‘he had become an ambassador for radical Britain’, and took Prime Minister Harold Macmillan to task for not condemning the French tests during his tour of Africa in early 1960.³⁴ But the sense of moral authority that characterised much of the support for the campaign also revealed more traditionalist elements within the disarmament movement. The marchers who joined the annual Easter pilgrimage from the atomic weapons research facility in Aldermaston to Trafalgar Square in London were, according to David Marquand, ‘the lineal descendants of pious, upstanding Victorian

²⁸ Martin Evans, *Algeria: France’s undeclared war* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 261-282.

²⁹ A. Carter to V. Hamers-Camatta, June 17, 1959. DAC 5/7/1.

³⁰ According to A.J. Muste, the former Prime Minister, Pierre Mendès-France expressed ‘admiration’ for the protest team during a lecture tour in the United States in early 1960. A.J. Muste to E. Peter, January 28, 1960 SPC, Muste Papers, Reel 89/16/Sahara Protest Team. On the ‘non-Communist Left’ and Algeria, see, for example, Todd Shepard, *The invention of decolonization: the Algerian War and the remaking of France* (Ithaca, 2006), pp. 64-65.

³¹ A. Carter to Arno & Vera Hamers-Camatta, September 2, 1959, DAC 5/7/1.

³² On ‘imperialist pacifism’ James Hinton, *Protests and visions: peace politics in twentieth-century Britain* (London, 1989). On ‘romantic protest’, see Meredith Veldman, *Fantasy, the Bomb and the Greening of Britain: Romantic Protest, 1945-1980* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 120.

³³ Ibid, p. 138.

³⁴ A. Carter, op. cit., p. 148.

pastors who thundered out against Bulgarian atrocities'. While he accepted that anti-nuclear weapons campaigners talked the 'language of internationalism', they did so with nationalist pride.³⁵

Holger Nehring has argued that, in contrast to West German protesters, British peace campaigners' references to an imperial past should not suggest inherent and crude traditionalism, but that the identity of British social movements could be expressed within, rather than in opposition to, a discourse of nationhood.³⁶ In stating, as some reportedly did, that the Aldermaston March 'was a kind of civilizing mission' it seemed that anti-nuclear protesters in Britain could articulate their moral purpose in a voice that would not have been out of place in the colonial service.³⁷ And yet, in the case of the Sahara protest, the ability to combine nationalist sentiments with an internationalist frame was attenuated by the encounter between political cultures in the throes of decolonization – the contrasting conditions of French and British imperial disengagement in Africa made the organisation of viable unified action against the tests highly unlikely. European social movements in the 1950s and 1960s were moulded by national political cultures, setting limits to the establishment of effective transnational communication. The difficulties evident in the case of relations between European movements were, however, of a different order to those associated with connections between Western and African movements.

In January 1960, Michael Scott left Ghana to attend the second All-African People's Conference, held in Tunisia, hoping to elicit continued support from African leaders. Scott focussed his efforts on persuading Nkrumah in particular, with apparent success when in March 1960, The Ghana Prime Minister's Office issued a press-release announcing plans for an 'emergency conference of independent African states' to discuss nuclear weapons tests and other 'neo-colonial' threats.³⁸ On Scott's recommendation, Michael Randle remained in Accra to assist with the organisation of the conference, working out of the office of Nkrumah's Bureau of African Affairs. Randle was keen that the conference should be seen as an 'African initiative', rather than 'an attempt by "Westerners" to import and impose their own ideas'.³⁹ Moreover, as Sutherland noted, the mood at pan-African meetings suggested that African leaders were disillusioned by international organisations and had begun to feel obliged to 'do something on their own'.⁴⁰ As a consequence, the Accra conference set opposition to nuclear weapons firmly within an anti-colonial rhetoric of opposition to French 'nuclear imperialism'. Language of that kind was perhaps

³⁵ D. Marquand, 'England, the Bomb, the Marchers'. *Commentary*, May 1960, pp. 382; 385.

³⁶ H. Nehring, (2007), op. cit., p. 28.

³⁷ M. Veldman, op. cit.

³⁸ M. Randle to DAC, 6 March 1960, DAC 5/7/20.

³⁹ M. Randle, 'Some Notes on the Positive Action Conference to Be Held in Accra', March 20, 1960. DAC 5/7/20.

⁴⁰ W. Sutherland to A.J. Muste, 3 March 1960, SPC, Muste Papers, Reel 89/7/African conference on nonviolence.

unsurprising in the context of decolonisation, and it also reflected a palpable sense of a contemporary crisis in European colonialism. In Algeria, the ‘week of the barricades’ in January 1960 had demonstrated that factions were determined to oppose de Gaulle’s plans, by force if necessary; meanwhile in March of that year, images of demonstrators shot by police in the South African township of Sharpeville outraged African – and world – opinion. From an African perspective, it was not possible to disaggregate the issue of nuclear tests from the emotions of anti-colonialism; as the Zambian nationalist leader Mainza Chona put it, the French tests were ‘both murder in cold blood as well as criminal trespass on our mother Africa’.⁴¹

Such sentiments in part reflected widespread public fears over the material effects of the detonation of an atomic weapon in Africa by a colonial power. When African leaders expressed their ‘indignation’ when plans for the Sahara tests were officially announced in August 1959, the French government claimed that ‘for several hundred miles around the testing ground there is no population centre and indeed hardly a single human being’.⁴² In response, the French ethnographer Odette du Puigaudeau wrote of the test-site at Reggane as part of a chain of oases that stretched toward the Moroccan border.⁴³ Official protests from African leaders were accompanied by public demonstrations in west Africa, heightened by the publication of images of survivors of Hiroshima. Public anxieties in Nigeria were particularly extensive, with the Christian Council of Nigeria voicing concerns that ‘atomic particles’ would be carried by the prevailing wind into the country, while the Federation of Nigerian Women's Organisations were reported to have sent a telegram to Queen Elizabeth II, asking her to ‘protect the lives of Nigerian sons and daughters by appealing to the French government’.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, the University of Ibadan issued a statement expressing concern over contamination of the cereal crops upon which both human populations and their livestock were dependent.⁴⁵

Popular anxieties over pollution thus contributed to African responses to the tests. In Michael Randle’s view, however, they were shaped predominantly by ‘resentment of yet another colonialist outrage in Africa’, rather than anti-nuclear pacifism. Failure to take account of the colonial dimension would, he felt remove the issue from its necessary ‘historical context’.⁴⁶ Transnational solidarity could not, however, crystallise around the anti-nuclear issue alone, and western campaigners appeared unwilling to compromise their principles of non-violence in the service of anti-colonialism. They sought instead to emphasize ‘the importance of the non-violent tradition in

⁴¹ M. Chona, ‘Speech at “Positive Action” Conference’, April 1960. DAC 5/7/21.

⁴² *Daily Telegraph*, London, 11 August 1959.

⁴³ O. du Puigaudeau, ‘The Atomic Age Reaches the Oases’, *Towards World Democracy*, October 1959, DAC 5/7/10.

⁴⁴ *Observer*, London, 10 August 1959.

⁴⁵ *Times*, London, July 15, 1959.

⁴⁶ M. Randle, ‘[untitled Memorandum]’, n.d 1960. Michael Randle Papers, University of Bradford (MR) 1/3.

the liberation struggle in Africa' and 'find responsible African leaders to play a leading part'.⁴⁷

When it came to the question of non-violence, western peace campaigners, despite having become attuned to the patterns of anti-colonial thought, were unable to relinquish the desire to shape discussion along the lines of their own ideological principles.

In the eyes of campaigners such as Scott and Sutherland, the moral force of the African revolution had been characterised by its tactics of non-violence. It had underpinned their support, and was a fundamental element of their own political philosophies.⁴⁸ In Ghana, the group were able to draw on sympathy and support from official channels, not least Nkrumah, who had championed a repertoire of non-violent tactics under the slogan of 'Positive Action' as the cornerstone of his leadership of the Gold Coast independence movement in the 1950s. The tactic appeared to echo the notions of Gandhian non-violent action that similarly inspired the DAC.⁴⁹ However, at the Tunis conference, advocates of a militant approach to liberation had scored a victory with a resolution calling for the formation of a volunteer brigade to fight alongside the FLN in Algeria.⁵⁰ Opening the Accra conference in April, however, Nkrumah repeatedly returned to the principle of 'positive action', re-framing it as a foundational principle for non-aligned politics 'in an age of nuclear madness and apartheid arrogance'. Nkrumah claimed non-violent positive action was 'the greatest single hope for peace, security and brotherhood among mankind'.⁵¹ Nevertheless, fears over the influence of what Sutherland called the 'violence boys' was growing within the circuits of the transnational peace movement, and the conference in Accra did little to alleviate those anxieties.

Again, the Algerian war lay at the centre of these tensions. In the speeches and comments of delegates at Accra, a clear distinction was drawn between French colonial violence, which was condemned on all sides, and the violence adopted by what the representative of the World Peace Council called the 'magnificent liberation army of Algeria'.⁵² One of the most well-received speeches at the conference, impressing western and African delegates in equal measure, was given by the subsequent philosopher of anti-colonial liberation, Frantz Fanon.⁵³ Fanon explained that non-violent protest had brought only vicious retribution and that, while colonial violence 'must first be fought by truth and reason', continued oppression had created 'inner violence in the oppressed' that ultimately led to 'purely animal' acts of self-preservation.⁵⁴ Western peace-campaigners had come

⁴⁷ M. Randle, 'Some Notes on the Positive Action Conference to Be Held in Accra', March 20, 1960. DAC 5/7/20.

⁴⁸ See Michael Scott, *A time to speak* (Garden City, 1958), pp. 295-312; W. Sutherland and M. Meyer, op. cit.

⁴⁹ Lawrence Wittner, op. cit., p. 266.

⁵⁰ M. Randle, 'Some Notes on the Positive Action Conference to Be Held in Accra', March 20, 1960. DAC 5/7/20.

⁵¹ A. Carter, 'Draft Article on Conference on Peace and Security in Africa', n.d 1960. DAC 5/7/20.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ W. Sutherland and Matt Meyer, op. cit., p. 40.

⁵⁴ W. Birmingham, 'Report to the American Friends' Service Committee', 1960, SPC, Muste Papers, Reel 89/16/Sahara Protest Team, p. 4.

to Accra with the hope that international solidarity against nuclear weapons might provide a platform for a new era of peaceful co-operation; instead a new vision of liberation was emerging, centred on a sense of African solidarity rather than affinities with transnational pacifism.

Pan-Africanist sentiment exposed fault lines in the transnational politics of anti-nuclear weapons movements. When the Sahara protest team had gathered in Accra in late 1959, the Ghanaian authorities had insisted that a 'working committee' was formed, which excluded Randle from its discussions.⁵⁵ Understandable fears of 'neo-colonialism' thus began to shape the relationship between western activists and African officials. These fears surfaced again at the 'Positive Action' conference. Many African delegates found the presence of Westerners advocating passive resistance far from welcome, while Western observers felt the conference speeches expressed rather too much visceral anti-French sentiment.⁵⁶ Walter Birmingham reported that the conference committee on Algeria had, on Fanon's insistence, refused to allow Pierre Martin a hearing, while both Martin and Esther Peter were suspected of acting as French 'spies'.⁵⁷ The conference heard expressions of antipathy towards France, calls for increased international pressure, economic sanctions and boycotts against French goods and assets, and a specific plea for support from the peoples of the French African community. The conference speeches and resolutions reveal feelings of identification *against* imperial and colonial power, rather than universal human solidarity.

Despite the attention given to the crises in Algeria and South Africa, efforts were made to rekindle the anti-nuclear campaign that had provided the original impetus for the conference. Calls were made for a thousand African volunteers to form an enlarged Sahara protest, while plans were mooted to deploy African students in Europe as potential interlocutors between pan-African and western peace movements.⁵⁸ And, at the heart of Nkrumah's conference address was a pledge to fund a training centre where 'volunteers would learn the essential disciplines of concerted positive action'.⁵⁹ After the conference, Scott, Sutherland and Randle began to consult with the Ghanaian authorities on a centre for non-violent resistance in the coastal town of Winneba.⁶⁰ There were, however, significant difficulties for the establishment of a successful training centre, not least the perceived dangers of too close an affiliation with government. As April Carter observed, 'at some

⁵⁵ B. Rustin to G. Willoughby, 26 November 1959, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Papers of the Committee for Non-Violent Action (CNVA) VI/Sahara Project Correspondence.

⁵⁶ W. Birmingham, op. cit.; A. Carter, 'Article on Conference on Peace and Security in Accra', n.d 1960. DAC 5/7/20.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ A.J. Muste, 'Reports from Abroad', *Africa Today*, 7, 4 (1960), p. 4; A.J. Muste to A. Trocmé, 18 April 1960, SPC, Muste Papers, Reel 89/7/African nonviolent movement.

⁵⁹ A. Carter, 'Draft Article on Conference on Peace and Security in Africa', n.d 1960. DAC 5/7/20. BPC.

⁶⁰ W. Sutherland to A.J. Muste, 29 April 1960, SPC, Muste Papers, Reel 89/16/Sahara Protest Team.

stage the non-violent ideal will clash openly with power politics, and the government concerned will have to choose between the two'.⁶¹ Scott had envisaged the centre as a place for 'those who want to find the right means of struggle in the coming age of nuclear power and neo-imperialism', but the plans were transformed into an institution for training anti-colonial activists, a kind of non-violent variant of the military training camps that were being established to support liberation movements in Africa.⁶²

The plans for the Winneba centre were soon sidetracked by events elsewhere in Africa. By July 1960, with the Ghanaian army heavily committed as peacekeepers in the Congo, Nkrumah's interest appeared to have waned. Sutherland explained this as a consequence of the nature of the Congo crisis, in which Nkrumah sensed little significant role for non-violent activists – this was itself something of an indictment of the plans. Furthermore, he felt that Nkrumah had come under the influence of Marxists who saw non-violence as 'fuzzy do-goodism which will lose Nkrumah the leadership of Africa'.⁶³ In September 1960, it became clear that the non-violent 'positive action' centre was to be subsumed within a college for trade union leaders and CPP party members. As Muste pointed out, there was little chance of international peace movements becoming involved 'in an institute responsible to the Central Committee of the CCP [sic]'.⁶⁴ In response to suggestions that he and Sutherland might consider teaching posts at the new institute, Randle wrote to Nkrumah outlining his thoughts on the relationship between peace activists and State institutions. He acknowledged that the State was obliged to respond to situations 'with the resources available to it', and that the use of the military might at times be 'constructive in character'. Here, he drew a distinction between African contributions to the UN force in the Congo and the 'unconstructive' creation of nuclear forces by Britain and France. Nevertheless, he informed Nkrumah, his belief in non-violent action went beyond 'purely tactical considerations' and his involvement in the training centre would depend on him maintaining 'independence of opinion'.⁶⁵ But before the centre was established, Randle was recalled to the UK to support Scott and Bertrand Russell in the formation of a direct-action break-away from CND, the Committee of 100.⁶⁶

On one level, the fate of the Winneba Centre embodied in microcosm the shift from non-violence to armed struggle that was underway within African liberation movements. However, the episode also suggests that the failure to build transnational connections stemmed from the capacity for national and racial identities to over-ride the construction of a solidarity centred on ideological

⁶¹ A. Carter, 'Non-violence and the African future', *Peace News* (May 1960).

⁶² 'Positive Action Centre', 10 June 1960, DAC 5/7/20.

⁶³ W. Sutherland to A. J. Muste, 18 July, 1960, SPC, Muste Papers, Reel 89/16/Sahara Protest Team.

⁶⁴ A.J. Muste to W. Sutherland, 8 September 1960, SPC, Muste Papers, Reel 89/7/African nonviolent movement.

⁶⁵ M. Randle to K. Nkrumah, October 1, 1960, MR 1/3.

⁶⁶ M. Randle to Barden, 19 October 1960, MR 1/3.

affinities and moral principles. As Allman has shown, presenting the Sahara protest in terms of 'Black internationalism' and what Kevin Gaines called a 'transnational culture of opposition' to western colonialism, is relatively straightforward, and reminds us that pan-African activist networks provided a foundation for global social protest.⁶⁷ And yet, the discontinuities between networks that are revealed in an examination of the Sahara protest were not simply a black and white issue.

At the 'Positive Action' conference, Arab and Anglophone African opposition to the tests was contrasted with an apparent lack of protest from French West Africa, although there had in fact been vocal opposition to the tests from Francophone African political leaders.⁶⁸ Similarly, African-American activists such as Rustin and Sutherland were drawn to the campaign as much through their participation in international pacifist networks as a sense of racial solidarity. In the eyes of one biographer, Rustin was 'was attracted to the measured style and quiet self-assurance of a certain type and class of the English person', suggesting patrician qualities that promoted identification with the British middle-classes as much as African political leaders.⁶⁹ Moreover, as Allman herself shows, Rustin and Sutherland had long-standing connections with British pacifists, which facilitated movement between Africa, the United States and Britain. These were multi-stranded transnational connections that circumvented some of the ideological and cultural discontinuities exposed in the Accra conference of 1960. The campaign against French nuclear tests was not shaped by the formation of transnational communities centred on imagined and racial solidarities, but instead through transnational connections facilitated by 'issue networks'.⁷⁰

Historical interpretations of the politics of protests against the first French nuclear weapons tests might therefore lead to a critical account of the limits of a transnational approach, or at least an account affords such considerations only a limited value. In empirical terms, the Sahara protest was shaped by the interaction of European, African and North American campaigners embedded in transnational pacifist networks, but beyond that, the campaign's failure to break down national boundaries was evident. In terms of the politics of anti-nuclear weapons protest, nationalist sentiment tended to shape engagement with international campaigns. But supra-national organisations continued to play an influential role in setting the parameters of debates around nuclear weapons and imperialism, albeit in a somewhat different register than that of the Sahara protest. Thus, when discussions around disarmament and nuclear arms control returned to Accra two years after the 'Positive Action' conference, a very different form of transnational politics was

⁶⁷ J. Allman, op. cit., pp. 83-102; Kevin Gaines, op. cit.

⁶⁸ Lawrence Wittner, op. cit., p. 80.

⁶⁹ Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: troubles I've seen : a biography* (New York, 1997), p. 218.

⁷⁰ See Cooper, op. cit.

in play.

Nkrumah had remained committed to world disarmament, and argued that the vast sums spent on developing nuclear weapons could be more usefully spent on developing the economies of the states emerging from imperial control.⁷¹ He became closely engaged with the early development of the Non-Aligned Movement, and had attended the Belgrade Conference of Non-Aligned Countries in September 1961. And, although independent African states had split into a 'Brazzaville Group' of former French territories and 'Casablanca Group' of north African and Anglophone territories, Nkrumah continued to promote African unity as a necessary foundation for world peace.⁷² Following a meeting between Nkrumah and CND Chair Canon Collins in 1961, plans were put in place for a conference of non-aligned peace movements, sponsored by CND and the European Federation, but hosted by Ghana.⁷³ Some potential participants were guarded and noted the potential dangers of organising an international peace conference in Ghana when the country's internal politics was increasingly troubled. Gbedemah, the most committed anti-nuclear activist within Nkrumah's circle, has fallen out of favour and was reported to be in hiding, while Bill Sutherland had left the country. An international conference would thus be of advantage to Nkrumah domestically in ways the 1960 event had not.⁷⁴

A preparatory meeting took place in Zagreb in February 1962, and the tone of the planning documents – in which emphasis was given to the fact that participants were not 'attending in a representative capacity' or 'bound to any vote' seem to demonstrate a desire to insulate the meeting from east-west tensions.⁷⁵ The Assembly was designed as a conference of non-aligned movements, but, in the event (and notwithstanding their nominal unrepresentative status) the largest delegations hailed from the United States and the Soviet Union. These included figures with official connections, such as the former US Ambassador to the UN, James Wadsworth. The meeting was also attended by Homer Jack, a director of the US National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, whose presence was welcomed by William Foster, the Director of the newly-formed US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. Foster, while careful to acknowledge that Jack would not represent the US in any official capacity, was clearly comfortable with the contribution he felt Jack would make to the conference, writing that 'it will have a salutary effect if you state your views as

⁷¹ Kwame Nkrumah, *Africa must unite* (London, 1964), p. 199.

⁷² On Nkrumah and non-alignment, see Peter Willetts, *The non-aligned movement: the origins of a Third World alliance* (New York, 1978), pp. 11-13.

⁷³ Peggy Duff, *Left, left, left: a personal account of six protest campaigns, 1945-65* (London, 1971).

⁷⁴ H. Jack to Buchbinder, 13 December 1961, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Records of the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) B5/Accra Assembly 1962.

⁷⁵ Ibid; 'Accra Assembly Draft Rules', nd [c May 1962], SANE B5/Accra Assembly 1962.

your conscience prompts you'.⁷⁶ In general, delegates to the Assembly represented groups engaged in political lobbying, rather than direct action; while Nkrumah had worked closely with Randle and Scott, who had central positions in the organisation of the Committee of 100, it the Chair of CND, Canon John Collins, who represented British peace movements at the Accra Assembly.

Given the multiplicity of interests that were brought together, the overall message of the Assembly was somewhat blurred. The Assembly addressed a number of themes, some of which were presaged in the opening address by Nkrumah, who declared that the 'cold war mentality should be kept out of Africa', adding that post-war tensions were rooted in ideological conflict, colonialism and the possession of weapons of mass destruction, and an 'impartial inspection team' should be formed as a way of breaking the impasse in the Geneva disarmament talks.⁷⁷ Perhaps the most crucial issue addressed by the Assembly was that of the principle and processes of nuclear disarmament. The principle was discussed by the first committee, which explored the 'reduction of international tensions', made a number of recommendations regarding possible limitations on the further extension of nuclear weapons. It also courted controversy by calling for the Taipei-based Republic of China to be excluded from the UN, and condemned the European Common Market as 'economic discrimination' and the 'extension of the cold war into the field of trade'. Both statements were deleted from the final report.⁷⁸

The Assembly also explored the relationship between disarmament and development. Joseph Henry Mensah, who had returned from a post at the UN to work as a senior economist at the Planning Commission of Ghana, suggested that discussion of the economic costs of disarmament needed to focus as much on non-nuclear militarisation in Africa as it did on the arms race between superpowers. 'The world in which the great powers renounce their big bombs', he argued, 'must also be a world in which the smaller powers renounce their small bombs'.⁷⁹ Raising the scenario of a 'Balkans conflict' in Africa, dragging the world into war, he went on to argue that military spending had the potential to outstrip foreign aid flows by some margin. He proposed that programme for disarmament in Africa be considered, that established international protection from aggression and allowed states to maintain armed forces only to the level 'consistent with the ability of each government to maintain peace within its own borders'. While he appreciated the hurdles to disarmament in Africa, Mensah maintained that 'governments are notoriously incapable of appreciating the great economic burden ... or the danger to the efforts in economic development'

⁷⁶ W. Foster to H. Jack, May 31, 1962, SANE B 5/Accra Assembly, 1962.

⁷⁷ K. Nkrumah, 'Address to Accra Assembly', June 21, 1962, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Homer Jack Papers (HJ) VII-3 Accra Assembly, Official Docs.

⁷⁸ H. Jack, 'The Accra Assembly – report to SANE' 29 June 1962, SANE B5/Accra Assembly Reports 1962.

⁷⁹ J.H. Mensah, 'Disarmament and Africa's Economic Development', SANE B5/Accra Assembly Documents 1962.

associated with armed conflict.⁸⁰

There were attempts to establish a permanent organisation to carry on the work of the Assembly, and an office was established in Ghana, with Frank Boaten as General Director. In this role, Boaten attended the Oxford Conference of Non-Aligned Peace Organizations in January 1963, and took the Accra Assembly proposals to the founding conference of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa later that year. Boaten, however, recognised that he would ‘have to work very hard to get the conference to give serious consideration’ to his proposals.⁸¹ Another short-lived legacy of the Assembly emerged from committee discussions on nuclear arms control and inspection procedures, chaired by the Irish politician and human rights activist, Seán MacBride. Shortly after the Assembly, MacBride travelled to Geneva to deliver its report to national delegates at the ongoing disarmament talks.⁸² He was, along with other observers, guardedly optimistic about the achievements of the Assembly, and noted that the Assembly reports were well-received by the delegates in Geneva. One US expert suggested that the discussions in Accra had avoided the dangers of leaning ideologically towards either Soviet or western views. Nor was the conference, as British campaigners had reportedly feared, merely ‘amateurish’.⁸³ There were, nevertheless, some clear reservations, including regrets that the non-aligned delegates were unable to make ‘bolder proposals’, with the result that committee discussions became dominated by American and Soviet experts and thus a ‘replica of the Geneva Disarmament conference’.⁸⁴ Homer Jack noted that there were many ‘inevitable disappointments’, not least in the small number of African participants, but also the ‘failure of the Assembly as a whole to take many positive stands on outstanding cold war problems’.⁸⁵ While western pacifists such as Jack were motivated in part by anti-communist convictions, cold war tensions – already a factor in the internal politics of movements such as SANE – were an evident constraint on international co-operation.⁸⁶ The form of non-alignment employed by the participants, described by Jack as ‘a mathematical exercise in finding ideological equidistance between two poles’, was perceived to be a far from effective route to disarmament.⁸⁷ The Accra Assembly could, nevertheless, be conceivably regarded as one of the first global gatherings of non-aligned peace organisations, superseding regional groupings such as the

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ F. Boaten to H. Jack, May 14, 1963, SANE B 5/Gen Corres, ‘Atom Free Africa’.

⁸² S. MacBride to P. Noel-Baker, September 5, 1962, SANE B 5/Accra Assembly, 1962.

⁸³ W. Young, ‘Mosquitoes in Accra’, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, (September 1962), p. 46.

⁸⁴ H. Jack, ‘The Accra Assembly – report to SANE’ 29 June 1962, SANE B5/Accra Assembly Reports 1962.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ On anti-communism in US peace movements, see R. Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream: Communism, Anticommunism and the US Peace Movement, 1945-63*, (New York, 2000).

⁸⁷ H. Jack, ‘Accra Bans the Bomb’, *Africa Today* 9, 7 (September 1, 1962), pp.10–16. See also Lawrence Wittner, op. cit., pp. 301–2.

European Federation Against Nuclear Arms.

Viewed in terms of the unfulfilled promise of pan-African anti-nuclear pacifism, the Accra Assembly might be seen as indicative of the narrowing of options for ‘the space to imagine new worlds’ in the context of increased cold war tensions.⁸⁸ Nkrumah’s sponsorship of the Accra Assembly might alternatively be regarded as the moment at which the pan-African visions became incorporated within the formation of political structures of non-alignment. However problematic, compromised and ineffectual they may have been in creating a non-nuclear utopia, the discussions at the Accra Assembly provided a conduit between the superpowers and the non-aligned movement. Nevertheless, the Assembly further demonstrated the limits to transnational co-operation during the cold war.

Transnational peace activists felt increasingly anxious about the nexus of Cold War nuclear rivalries and decolonization at the start of the 1960s. Responses to the French tests in the Sahara reveal those anxieties in sharp relief, insofar as they interwove universalist fears over the emergence of a new nuclear power with more particular national concerns. European activists felt such concerns in relation to their own particular experiences of decolonization. In the British case, these were embodied in the popular view that disarmament was a path back to world influence, while French campaigns against the tests were muted by anxieties over a more violent disengagement from empire. African views, meanwhile, were shaped by the fear that independence would be tempered by the emergence of neo-colonialism. Above all, the events in the Congo, South Africa and Algeria that framed the debates around ‘nuclear imperialism’ were viewed through a filter of Cold War anxieties. Speaking before the UN Special Committee on Colonialism in 1962, Michael Scott stated that the ‘world cannot be allowed to be destroyed because of constitutional failure in Central Africa’.⁸⁹ While his comments, which focussed on the independence movements in Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), might in retrospect appear overwrought, when they are set against the larger picture of African politics in the early 1960s it is understandable that struggles for national political rights might be framed by visions of armageddon. As Scott acknowledged, the crises in the Congo and Algeria had demonstrated the dangers of ‘constitutional breakdown’

For transnational peace activists, the nuclear threat was immanent in their conception of an inter-connected world. But the reality of global interconnectedness remained even after the Cuban Missile Crisis and subsequent moves towards international agreement to limit weapons tests, when

⁸⁸ J. Allman, *op. cit.*, p 97. See also W. Sutherland and M. Meyer, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

⁸⁹ ‘WPB submission to UN Special Commission on Colonialism’, 5 June 1962, SPC, Muste, Reel 89-39, Africa Freedom Action.

the receding threat of imminent nuclear conflict made transnational anti-nuclear weapons campaigns arguably less urgent. The conventional geopolitics of the Cold War were sufficient in themselves to limit the options for newly-independent post-colonial states, as Nkrumah himself was increasingly aware. His vision of Ghana as the focus of a pan-African movement became less tenable as the nation-state became fixed as the sole legitimate structure for political geography. The coup d'état that removed Nkrumah from power in 1966 signalled the closing of a moment of supranational possibilities that the Sahara protest sought to embody.

The Sahara protest drew together intertwined, yet separate strands of social movement activity and although the campaign originated in an emergent pan-European anti-nuclear movement, the links between European networks were weak and fragile. Instead, networks of pacifists and religious organisations that connected British with US anti-nuclear movements facilitated the transnational campaign. These two movement traditions were held together in the matrix of Gandhian non-violent civil disobedience, a fusion of somewhat contrasting political ideologies with shared convictions as to the effectiveness of a particular form of protest. Crucially, these trans-Atlantic networks were also more closely linked with pan-African anti-colonial circuits, which facilitated the generation of a transnational campaign against the French tests. Although these networks enabled the mobilisation of protest across national boundaries and individual European campaigners were able to align themselves with African leaders, it was not possible to develop any meaningful imagined solidarity between European and African movements. In the interactions between European movements and the politics of 'emerging' nation states in Africa, transnationalism crystallised in the form of networks that facilitated connections between nation states, rather than the kind of communities that Clavin has envisaged, with 'open, porous, revisable and interactive' boundaries.⁹⁰

Although western peace campaigners found common cause with African political leaders and activists in their protests against 'nuclear imperialism', conflicting claims to cosmopolitan ideals and the more particular national or regional agendas of African leaders worked against the creation and maintenance of effective and long-standing transnational movements. The 'routinization of the nation-state' had closed down avenues for global activism that seemed viable for a moment in 1959. The networks that facilitated transnational protest were unable to forge movements that transcended the borders of the colonial/post-colonial state in the name of nationalist ambition, pan-African idealism *and* universal philosophies of peace and justice. Moreover, these histories do not suggest that 'transnational narratives' are shaped by western conceptions of modernity but, as Wendy Kozol

⁹⁰ Clavin, op. cit., p. 439.

has argued, ‘reveal modernity to be a multifaceted process whereby political, economic, and cultural exchanges occur in varied and often unpredictable ways’.⁹¹ European direct-action peace movements should be understood as being shaped by their engagement with, rather than their distinctions from anti-colonial nationalism in Africa.

The campaigns against ‘nuclear imperialism’ ultimately reflect the limits of transnational anti-nuclear campaigns in Europe and worldwide, but they also illustrate how the language of ‘global’ protest began to coalesce through the cross-border interactions of activist networks. The Sahara protest and the conferences that followed failed to bring a halt to French nuclear weapons tests, but the efforts to create an international movement against the tests shaped a practice of transnational activism that could be adopted, adapted and re-interpreted in particular national and local contexts. The limits of transnationalism can be seen, however, in the interaction between these different spheres of activity, and in particular, the tension between global and national agendas. The contradictions between the language of anti-nuclear pacifism and national liberation were brought into the open at the ‘Positive Action’ conference in 1960 illustrate the dilemma of western activists seeking to marry anti-colonial and pacifist campaigns. Peace, together with concerns for Africa, and the Third World more generally, became mooring-points in western New Left thinking, nurtured in post-war imperial decline. However, the realities of post-independence politics in Africa proved to be a constraint on the ambitions of western activists who had been inspired by the struggle against colonialism. The interests of independent post-colonial states were not conducive to cross-border movements beyond support for particular national agendas and struggles – while the struggle against ‘nuclear imperialism’ exemplified the possibilities for a unified struggle for peace, democratic freedom and civil rights, it also demonstrated a widening gap between the politics of protest in the west and the politics of the post-colonial state. Transnational anti-nuclear peace activism was shaped at the meeting-point between international pacifist networks and pan-Africanism liberation struggles.

It was, furthermore, in the interactions of global networks of activists, rather than the development of movements across national boundaries that the transnational dimension of cold war peace movements emerged. By 1962, it seems that transnational peace activism was being channelled through groups such as SANE and CND who saw national governments, political parties and international organisations as a key focus of campaign activity. While grassroots direct action had inspired campaigns such as the Sahara Protest, it was less valuable for transnational activism oriented towards the Non-Aligned Movement and the UN-sponsored Geneva disarmament

⁹¹ C.A. Bayly, et al., op. cit., p. 1459.

conferences. Similarly, Kwame Nkrumah found 'positive action' less viable as a pan-Africanist policy option as nationalist movements reluctantly turned to armed struggle, and as African Unity was transformed from an ideology of liberation to the organisation of continental diplomacy. Nevertheless, while local, regional and national contexts continued to matter, the transnational connections that were developed through the processes of challenging the nuclear arms race and European colonialism constituted a new arena for the politics of communicative and contentious action. The Sahara protestors, although foiled in their attempts to infiltrate international borders, helped to give form to a political space that fostered the transmissions of values of social justice, human rights and environmental concern across the boundaries of the nation state.